



Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

December 2015 Newsletter

Mule Deer Research Continues

In December, researchers with the University of Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department recaptured approximately 60 doe mule deer that had been fitted with GPS collars as part of two similar studies evaluating the deer's body condition and habitat on Pinedale area winter ranges. They performed ultrasonography on each animal to determine its percentage of body fat and pregnancy.

Researchers will monitor the animals each autumn to determine fawn recruitment rates and survival. Mule deer will be recaptured every December and March during the next two years to evaluate changes in their body condition between seasons. Ultimately, this information will allow wildlife managers to assess whether these deer herds are reaching their reproductive capacity based on current available habitat, or if other factors are responsible for suppressed population growth in recent years.

This research, the results of the hunting seasons, recent counts and habitat work will all be discussed at upcoming **public meetings January 5 in Pinedale, January 6 in Marbleton and January 7 in Thayne.**

(Clockwise from upper right) A hobbled mule deer is attached to the helicopter to be ferried to researchers 2) Dr. Kevin Monteith measures body fat on a deer 3) Back to winter range! 4) Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas conducts an interview 5) UW grad student Sam Dwinell releases a collared doe as State Legislator Fred Baldwin of Kemmerer looks on 6) Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick and Habitat Biologist Jill Randall take measurements.





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Mule Deer Poacher Convicted

Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas and Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas, son and father, respectively, recently teamed up to solve a poaching case in the Wyoming Range where mule deer are highly sought after by hunters. While enjoying a day off hunting together, the wardens observed suspicious activity, which resulted in an investigation and ultimate apprehension of the violators.

"In late September, Green River resident Christopher Galloway, 30, harvested two trophy buck mule deer on one license," said Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas. "Later in the day, Galloway involved a juvenile to tag the second buck mule deer. This incident occurred in deer hunt area 143, in the South Piney drainage. This hunt area is within the Wyoming Range, where deer are managed for higher buck ratios and buck quality."

Galloway was sentenced to two days in jail, loss of hunting privileges for three years, fined \$920 for taking an over-limit of deer and accessory to transfer of deer license, in addition to losing both deer. The juvenile was also cited and fined \$40 and will be required to give a presentation at a hunter education class.

"Regardless of the initial intention of this violation, the actions that followed, involving a juvenile, intentionally misleading game wardens, and trying to claim both deer made this violation worse," Adam Hymas said. "I applaud Judge Haws on his efforts to let the public know the importance of wildlife to the people of Sublette County and the entire state, his promotion of hunting legally and ethically, and the importance of hunting regulations."

Anyone with information on these or any wildlife violation may also call the Stop Poaching Hotline at 1-877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847). Tips may be reported to your local game warden or online at wgfd.wyo.gov Tips may also be reported to the Green River Game and Fish Office at 1-307-875-3223 or the Pinedale Game and Fish Office at 1-800-452-9107. Callers can remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$5,000 if the information leads to a conviction.



Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas (left) and Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas, hold the antlers of mule deer illegally taken in the South Piney Drainage in the Wyoming Range





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Behind the Badge

With mule deer scattered from winter ranges to mid elevation through all of November, elk hunters were seeing a lot of nice bucks and wondering where they were during the deer season! Elk hunters were having mixed success until mid November when snow started moving elk down to lower elevations and harvest increased in some areas around Pinedale.

Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas spent considerable time checking elk hunters and addressing multiple violations, which included three bulls that were shot after the bull season closed and one buck mule deer.

With the very low harvest, violations too were few and far between. **North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley** spent several days on the mule deer winter range and coordinated the 2015 task force, which brought in additional game wardens from other parts of the state. No violations were detected and few contacts made on the winter range. Overall, compliance has been good with only a few enforcement actions taken in the winter range.

South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft checked late season antlerless elk hunters during November, also reporting low success due to extremely mild weather conditions.

Kraft also responded to a number of buck mule deer that were reported suspiciously dead. After performing a necropsy on the animals most were found to be antler wounds from sparring with other bucks (All photos below).



Jordan Kraft patrolled elk and white-tailed deer hunters during November and documented numerous hunters without the proper stamps. Most elk hunt areas in the Pinedale Region require elk hunters to purchase an elk special management stamp in addition to the required conservation stamp.





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Mule Deer on the Move

As mule deer make their annual migration to winter ranges, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department works to maintain a presence there to watch for poachers or suspicious activity. Each year, additional game wardens from around the state work stints to help get the coverage.

Mule deer from the Sublette and Wyoming Range herds spend the winter in the Pinedale/Big Piney/LaBarge area. Although trophy mule deer can be difficult to find in the vast backcountry during hunting seasons, they are more visible, and more vulnerable, as they transition to winter ranges.

“We end our hunting seasons when we do to protect these animals during the winter months when they are more vulnerable,” said Game and Fish Regional Supervisor John Lund. “These deer face many challenges, and blatant illegal shooting is especially disturbing.”

Game wardens continue to focus their attention on these mule deer winter ranges, but they still need help. “We do not have the personnel to be everywhere, all the time, so we rely on reports from the public,” said Lund. “There are quite a few people out there watching the deer and their reports of suspicious activity can be extremely helpful. Whether you’re a hunter or just a wildlife enthusiast, the illegal shooting of these animals should not be tolerated by anyone.”

To report a wildlife crime, please call the Stop Poaching Hotline at 1-877-WGFD-TIP. Callers can remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward if a conviction is made.



(Above) South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft inspects a fawn carcass found on the winter range south of Boulder.

(Below) Kraft visits with a photographer on the winter range and hands him a business card to report suspicious activity.



Whoa Pardner!

As deer and other big game make their way to winter ranges, they also have to face many obstacles including highways. Regional Game and Fish personnel work closely with WYDOT to strategically place the electronic warning signs along area highways. Motorists are reminded to pay heed to the signs warning of the increased possibility of wildlife crossing roadways.





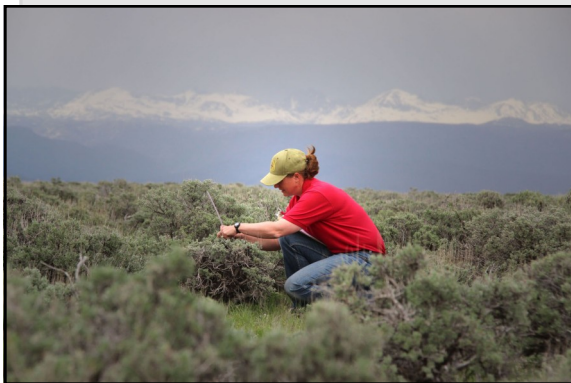
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Big Game Groceries

The growing conditions were excellent in 2015 for shrubs on winter ranges in the Pinedale Region. The quantity of precipitation was above average and it came during spring and early summer where it resulted in annual production on shrubs (see figure below). Spring and summer rains also generated good conditions for seed production on shrubs. Although seed production is the first step in seedling establishment, growing conditions for three years will need to be favorable to establish a new age class of Wyoming big sagebrush and many other shrub communities.

The climate in 2014 and 2015 were both favorable for recruiting a new age class in many shrub communities, but growing conditions in 2016 will likely still influence survival of these young plants. Leader production in 2015 for true mountain mahogany averaged five inches across the five transects that were monitored (Figure below).



Even with favorable forage production on winter ranges, winter severity including snow depth, temperature, and crusting conditions will greatly influence over-winter survival. Fortunately, summer conditions allowed wildlife to maximize fat reserves in 2015 and recruitment of fawns appears to be good from both 2014 and 2015. Many habitat treatments Wyoming Game and Fish Department has planned for Wyoming Range and Sublette mule deer herds have the objective of establishing young age class shrubs for long-term improvements of wildlife foraging conditions.

Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall measures sagebrush leader growth on the Pinedale Mesa.

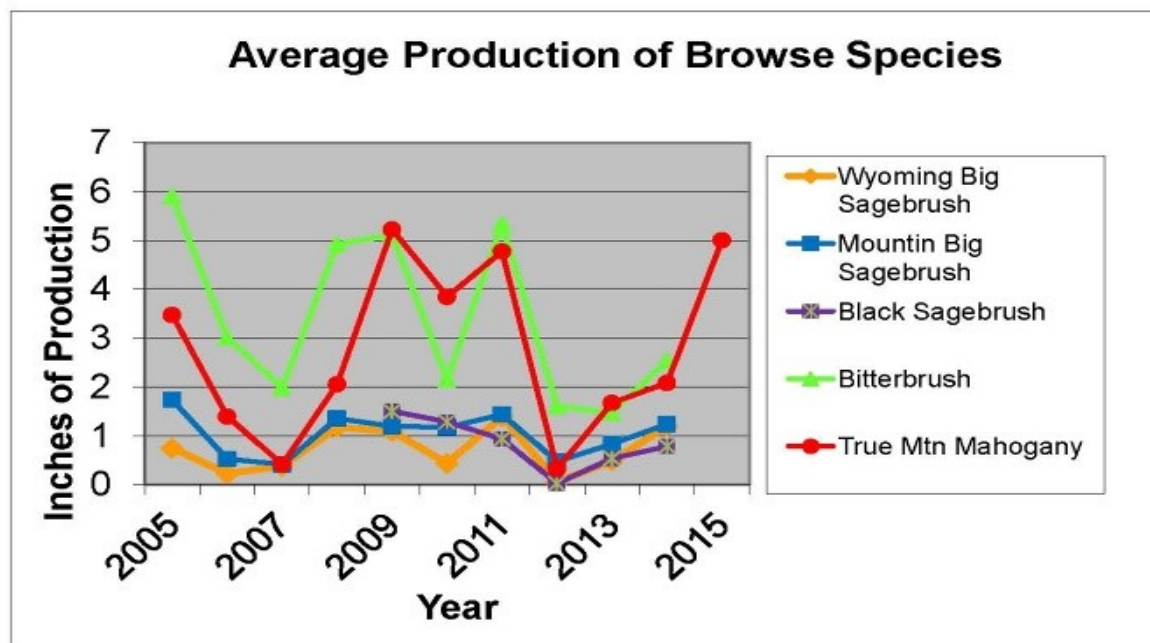


Figure 2. Production on shrubs from 2005 through 2015.



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Brucellosis Works Continues

As the Game and Fish Department rolled out its updated Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) management plan to the public, Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat personnel were busy collecting CWD samples from road-killed deer and moose, and hunter harvested elk, as is done every fall and winter. Juliann Terry, the National Elk Refuge CWD technician, was busy collecting samples from successful hunters' elk as snowstorms in late November initiated migrations to the Refuge.

A lymph node is collected from a cow elk.

Brucellosis personnel began ramping up work to update the Brucellosis Management Action Plans (BMAPs) for the seven elk herd units containing feedgrounds. A top recommendation of the Governor's Brucellosis Coordination Team, the seven plans were first completed in 2006, then updated in 2011, and are again due to be updated in 2016.

The plans summarize elk and brucellosis management, along with results of any research, conducted in the herds. Lists of cattle producers with operations in each elk herd are generated, then they are invited to a meeting to discuss various brucellosis management options that could reduce brucellosis among elk attending feedgrounds, and indirectly reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle. Meetings will be held in mid-December, and federal land managers and livestock veterinary health officials are planning to attend to answer any pertinent questions that may arise.



Brucellosis GIS specialist Cheyenne Stewart assesses the best option to cut an aspen off the Soda Lake elk feedground fence.

Brucellosis personnel assisted the Habitat and Access crew by riding approximately 16 miles of the Soda Lake elk fence, cutting down trees that had fallen on the fence and repairing damaged wires. The entirety of the 26 mile-long fence is ridden every fall to ensure its integrity.

Brucellosis section biologists completed final repairs to the elk traps at Muddy and Scab Creek feedgrounds. These feedgrounds, along with the Fall Creek feedground, are the sites where a pilot elk test and slaughter project took place from 2006-2010 in an attempt to reduce incidence of brucellosis among the elk wintering there. Every winter since, brucellosis program personnel have captured and sampled elk from two of the

feedgrounds to assess longevity of the brucellosis reduction associated with slaughtering around 200 brucellosis positive elk. Brucellosis prevalence rose in the first winter following cessation of slaughter, and has continued to rise every year thus far.

Brucellosis GIS Specialist Cheyenne Stewart (left) and Piney brucellosis biologist Eric Mai-chak finish re-setting a post supporting the main gate on the Scab Creek feedground. The structure had shifted after a large windstorm, preventing the gate from functioning.





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Talk of the Town...

Or maybe 'Talk of the Office' would be more appropriate. A few years ago a local resident found a small turtle in his driveway. Tuttle, as he's now named, is an Ornate Box Turtle not native to the Pinedale area .



With the winter season upon us ,Tuttle the turtle is expected to go into hibernation, but it's unclear whether anyone told him how! He is giving it a good try though. He's got the front half figured out.

He's destined to live out his life in captivity, since he doesn't know how to forage for food and has to be hand fed. But Tuttle has become a favorite for office visitors of all ages as he cruises around the office in his turtle ball or gobbles down meal worms for breakfast. Tuttle serves as a good reminder, pets are a long-term commitment. "Don't Let It Loose!"



Tuttle cruising the office in his ball.

Fish News

The Boulder Hatchery continued the Fall Rainbow Trout spawn in November with a total green egg take thus far of 2.4 million. The Boulder hatchery crew was appreciative of the help they received from Pete Feck, Jake Foos, Tim Kurtz, Kris Holmes, Greg Lehr, Darren Rhea and Des Brunette.

Pete Starr from Speas Hatchery delivered 42,000 Colorado River Cutthroat transfers to Boulder. And Boulder shipped 320,000 eyed kokanee eggs to the Dubois Hatchery in November.

Matt Joki and Joe Gillis attended the Fish Division meeting in Lander. Matt gave a presentation on Boulder operations and Joe gave a presentation on the East Fork Hatchery.

Boulder had 16 visitors during November.

Pinedale Fish Biologist Darren Rhea contacted anglers at Boulder Lake who were taking advantage of the early ice fishing conditions. Not many fish were caught in this group. We received one report of a Boulder Lake ice angler catching a lake trout over 15 pounds this month.

Pete Cavalli attended another preconstruction meeting for the Fremont Lake boat ramp/dock/fishing pier project. The contractor mobilized equipment with plans of starting demolition work early in the month. Construction activities will begin in the spring after the ice on the lake melts.



Pinedale Fish Biologist Darren Rhea hoists a large lake trout that was netted and released in Green River Lake.